

Hoarding: Definition, Recognition and Engagement



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HOARDING

WHAT IS IT

WHAT DO WE SEE

DEFINITION

- Hoarding is the acquisition of, and failure to discard a large number of possessions or accumulated items, which may be present in or around a residence.
 - Items often seen by others as little or no value
 - Living spaces, furniture, appliances and utilities are sufficiently cluttered as to prevent their intended use -- -interferes with basic activities, including cooking, cleaning, showering and sleeping
 - This can also prevent entrance into or exit from rooms or the entire residence.
 - This could pose a significant risk to health, safety or the maintenance of housing.
 - Often causes impairment or distress
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POTENTIAL SIGNS OF HOARDING

- Blocked access or exit to any door or window due to clutter;
 - Clutter that impedes or prevents movement in and around residence; (narrowing of hallways, portions of rooms blocked off)
 - Clutter that prevents any part of the inside or outside of a dwelling to be used for its intended purpose;
 - Trash and garbage inside or outside residence (not in designated receptacles)
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- Signs of rodent/insect infestation or factors associated with health concerns that could have an impact on resident or neighbors;
 - Visible damage to stairs, ceilings, floors or walls;
 - A large number of animals that are not being cared for and cause a health risk for the occupants, neighbors, and/or general public;
 - Kitchen appliances and/or bathroom fixtures that are not functional and/or accessible
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- Combustible materials stored too close to a source that could ignite it i.e. stove, over heater vents, portable electric heaters, furnace, gas cans, fireplaces;
 - Absence of working smoke detectors
 - Gas cans or other noxious materials, stored in a residence, of which the fumes become a potential health hazard;
 - Absence of running water, heat and/or electricity
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- When we are looking at situations that put the person or others at risks involving
 - ❑ Safety
 - ❑ Health
 - ❑ Possible death
 - Outside help is often needed –
 - ❑ Crisis Mental Health Services
 - ❑ Adult Protective Services,
 - ❑ Child Protective Services,
 - ❑ Code Enforcement, or
 - ❑ Fire department.
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APS and Hoarding

History of Hoarding in Maryland

- Hoarding - Legal action not taken by APS
 - Not determined a public health and safety issue
 - Little knowledge of treatment modalities
 - No known task force activity in Maryland
 - OCD considered main diagnosis of those who hoard
 - No collaboration – groups frustrated with one another
 - Few resources available for professionals (APS)
 - Many states ahead of Maryland (i.e. N. Virginia, New York and Massachusetts)
 - At present, two hoarding task forces in Montgomery County; Howard County in development stage)
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APS Intervention

- APS often first responder
 - Develop professional accepting relationship
 - Positive reactions
 - Do not preach
 - What is the situation (surprise or reported)
 - Baby steps – give it time
 - Research as much resources as possible
 - What are the family and financial resources
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How can the client take control?

- Does the client acknowledge a problem?
 - Is the client willing to contract?
 - Is there a possibility of losing the dwelling?
 - Will the client accept treatment?
 - Is the client capable of advocating for self?
 - Does the client need more time?
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What to do for an incompetent client?

- Legal actions – code enforcement
 - Family, friends and faith community
 - What will the agency do?
 - Placement – temporary or permanent
 - Guardianship – temporary or permanent
 - Maintaining safety and comfort level
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Best Practice

- Client to de-clutter with support of therapist and de-clutter expert
 - Client has sufficient time to make therapeutic changes
 - Client to have post de-clutter therapy to maintain
 - Life style change
 - Objects in trash and give away receptacles to be removed each day preferable by objective person
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HOARDING









ADDITIONAL SIGNS OF HOARDING

- Extreme collection and storage of items in the home and in the outside areas
 - Accumulation of combustible materials (newspapers, magazines and rubbish as well as paint, solvents and multiple examples of cleaning products)
 - Blocked exits (doors/windows)
 - All windows covered with diverse materials including piled objects (books, newspapers, boxes and occasionally sheets and tarp)
 - Narrow pathways in the home
 - Rat and/or insect infestations also including maggots, bed bugs, fleas and even reptiles.
 - Rotting food and/or used food containers
 - Human and/or animal waste
 - Long-term neglect of home maintenance
 - Non-working utilities, such as heat, running water, sewer, refrigeration
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DANGERS OF HOARDING

- The collection of newspapers, magazines, old clothes, paint and chemical products may cause fire and exacerbate the fire once it begins.
 - Animal hoarding can spread contagious diseases
 - EMTs' often are unable to find people during fires until it is too late
 - Large piles of items can fall upon the hoarder and helpers, both injuring and in some instances killing the people.
 - Adjacent property owners are also at risk primarily of fire, insect infestation and the risk of the hoarders' property falling on the neighbor's property
 - The amount of heat released from the contents (BTU's) often exceed the design of fire protection systems and fire wall ratings.
 - Affects ability to escape for those in the house and for those who have gone in to help rescue the residents.
 - Rapid fire spread/high heat decreases time of failure for fire resistant materials (collapse).
 - Substantial weight increase can exceed the structural design. Weight can be from materials themselves or from absorbing water.
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HOARDING DATA

- Hoarders make up approximately 2 to 5% of the general population.
 - In Montgomery County, Md., 12% of all APS cases involve hoarding. Estimated 20,000 – 50,000.
 - Between one in four to one in five people with dementia are also hoarders.
 - 115,588 – 288,960 estimated cases in Maryland
 - 5% of U.S. population would account for approximately 15 million in the US
 - Seniors comprise approximately 14 % of the population
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WHY DO OLDER PEOPLE HOARD

- Items are perceived as valuable
 - Items provide a source of security
 - Fear of forgetting or losing items
 - Constant need to collect and keep things
 - Obtaining love not found from people
 - Fear others will obtain their personal information
 - Physical limitations and frailty
 - Inability to make changes
 - Lack of motivation
 - The hoarder does not recognize a problem with his/her life style
 - Hoarding is a successful compulsion
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Cluttering: The Things?

Many older people by definition have lived many years. There are things that they have collected over the years and as their energy decreases; and maybe depression develops, they no longer have the energy to “weed out things they no longer need” or to put things away even when they come back from grocery shopping or even when someone delivers the food. Where do they put things? They may have to move other things to make room. This action takes effort that they can’t muster. Some people collected favorite things but have now moved to an apartment from a single family home. They have boxes to unpack, but don’t have the energy or the room to place another thing. They don’t even have the energy to throw or give it away. That is a picture of cluttering. The person who clutters might not have the energy to get to the magazines that are arriving. Thus, they remain in piles.

Psychological, Emotional and Behavioral Factors

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- Hoarding is a problem of emotional, mental, behavioral and social well being
 - Not an issue of laziness, stubbornness,
 - These are behaviors that are not totally in the persons control
 - Problems can relate to personality traits symptoms of concurrent diagnoses

Acquiring

- Buy more than needed – stores, yard sales, online. If something is on sale may buy multiples (many multiples)
 - Get free things – samples, packets of sugar, ketchup, newspapers
 - Items that others discard – in their trash, on their curbs for pickup, or in dumpsters
 - Using acquiring new objects as rewards
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Failure to Discard

- New item is very special to them and they often see a value that others cannot see (how it could be used)
- Fear of discarding – may need it at some time
- Feeling wasteful
- Sentimental attachment to the item
- When possessions accumulate to great proportions, the job is so overwhelming and anxiety producing, it is easier to keep it than to decide whether to discard and have the energy they feel is needed for the task.

Traits or feelings that can contribute to the problem

- Poor Attention (ADHD 15% – 20%)-easily distracted, difficulty sorting
 - Problems with decision making
 - Perfectionism
 - Problems with categorization, organizing tasks
 - Impulsivity
 - Impaired or “special” Sensitivity
 - Obtaining a sense of security or safety having their possessions
 - Problems with memory – needing visual cues – often too many
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Feelings that can maintain problem

- Acquiring and keeping may lead to a positive feeling of having found that new item – whether there is space for to it or not
 - positive feeling maintaining behavior
- Discarding may be accompanied by anxiety, grief, guilt
 - Negative feeling maintaining behavior

Some behaviors may include

- Inspecting possessions
 - Counting items
 - Looking through circulars for sales
 - Maintaining clutter
 - Making piles/clutter visible
 - Making “discard piles” without actually discarding
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Co-Morbid diagnosis

- Major Depression (57%)
- Social Phobia (29%)
- Generalized Anxiety disorder (28%)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (17%)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (6%)
- ADHD (15 – 20%)
- Dysthymia (4%)
- Panic (2%)

Diagnosis

- Presently is not an Axis I Diagnosis
 - Our chief psychiatrist, Dr. Roger Peele is a member the Task Force for the DSM V and is working on getting this included as an Axis I Diagnosis for treatment
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How Do We Help?

Some Clinical Tools

Treatment

- Have to treat both the environment and the person
 - But if you focus only on the environment, the problem will probably recur:
 - Person:
 - Sorting
 - Non Acquiring
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Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Deals with the cognitive errors that so often maintain the saving
 - These are my most beautiful, valuable things
 - I might need something later
 - If I arrange these properly, there will be no problem
 - If I move to a larger residence or get a storage unit this will be no problem
 - This is not hurting anyone
 - Its too much for me to do
 - I I let someone in to fix something, I will be reported and possible evicted
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- Behavioral techniques that help with sorting:

- Time of day
 - Length of session
 - Categorizing objects
 - Selecting/Dividing space
 - Sorting by keep – place
 - not keep – donate, garbage, recycle
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- Behavioral techniques that help with acquiring:
 - ❑ Exposure hierarchy
 - ❑ Need vs. want
 - ❑ Acquiring rating scale
 - ❑ Alternative ways to deal with feelings – anger, sadness,
 - ❑ Do I have something similar
 - ❑ Avoid triggers
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Picture of a hoarder

- Across gender
 - From age 13 to 110
 - Across all socio-economic parameters
 - Genetic factors
 - Learned Behaviors
 - Coping with stress, trauma and loss
 - Information processing deficits
 - Visual
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A Hoarder might:

- They might have moved into a smaller abode.
 - They might receive groceries from friends, shoppers or get them themselves.
 - However, they might “borrow from the McDonald’s when they go there. They take packets of sugar, packets of salt, pepper, ketchup and, of course, they will keep the container in which the McDonald’s came from.
 - They might ask for an extra container every time they go to a restaurant. They might wash out the containers, but more than likely, they will just leave it in a pile which is co-mingled with other piles.
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- They might even go to trash bins next to groceries and bring back some of that bread that “someone threw out by accident”. After all, who would dream of throwing away “good” bread. It might come in handy if someone is hungry.
 - The hoarder goes out and gets magazines sometimes from the next door neighbor’s stoop or more than likely from another “valuable” trash bin.
 - Their piles of newspapers date back years and years. They might, in fact, sleep on the newspapers. Their beds are piled too high to get to the top.
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ARE HOARDERS SICK?

Often they are:

- S- Sensitive
- I- Intelligent
- C- Creative
- K- Kind